



Representing UW-Madison Faculty.
Strengthening Wisconsin.

June 5, 2015

Dear Faculty Colleague,

At the University of Wisconsin, as at virtually all Ph.D.-granting universities, tenure is an established and essential safeguard of our freedom to pursue knowledge without regard to the fickle priorities of administrators or politicians. For many decades, we have been exceptionally fortunate to have tenure protections explicitly enshrined in state law.

Equally central to who we are, and likewise guaranteed by state law, is our strong tradition of shared governance, which has arguably been a major contributing factor in both the recruitment and retention of our best faculty as well as in our world-renowned educational quality and scholarly productivity.

To date, no peer institution, to our knowledge, has enjoyed comparable statutory support for both academic freedom and participatory decision-making. **If proposed new language is passed into law in the coming weeks, tenure protections at the University of Wisconsin will become among the weakest in the nation relative to other Ph.D.-granting institutions.**

Faculty were understandably alarmed when Governor Walker's budget bill, unveiled last February, proposed to remove these provisions from statute and leave them entirely to the discretion of the Board of Regents. Some relief followed when, in March, the Regents passed a resolution promising to uphold the existing policies if and when the Governor's proposal passed.

While the proposed transfer from state law to regent policy would have been significant and disheartening, it would have still at least left us in the same position as virtually all of our peer doctoral institutions.

Last Friday, however, the Legislature's Joint Finance Committee (JFC) unveiled, and quickly voted 12-4 to approve, an [omnibus motion](#) to amend the Governor's proposals regarding the University of Wisconsin System. There are positive aspects of the motion, including a reduction in the biennial cut to UW System to \$250 million. But a great deal of previously unseen -- and certainly unexpected -- non-fiscal language was also included, some of which aggressively redefines both shared governance and tenure.

Of the many provisions that concern us, by far the most important is item #39, which would allow the Board of Regents to "terminate any faculty or academic staff . . . due to a budget or program decision regarding program discontinuance, curtailment, modification, or redirection." It is the view of the PROFS Steering Committee that this provision, if passed, would fundamentally weaken traditional tenure protections and open the door, at least in principle, for a future Board of Regents to lay off tenured faculty for reasons that fall far short of a declaration of financial emergency, which remains the standard at almost all other peer institutions.

Since the motion was approved, and continuing our advocacy on behalf of the Faculty Senate, PROFS has issued two statements:

- [Statement by PROFS in response to JFC action on the UW System Budget](#), May 30, 2015
- [Statement by PROFS in response to JFC omnibus motion #521, item #39](#), June 2, 2015

The omnibus motion itself and the above PROFS statements have received considerable national attention from [Slate](#), [Academe](#), the [New York Times](#), the [Washington Post](#), and the [AAUP](#), among other



*Representing UW-Madison Faculty.
Strengthening Wisconsin.*

outlets and organizations.

PROFS has shared these statements with the entire Wisconsin Legislature, urging lawmakers to remove non-fiscal policy items, especially item #39, from the state budget.

We and others also communicated with members of the Board of Regents in advance of yesterday's meeting in Milwaukee, urging them to issue a strong public statement calling for the removal item #39 from the proposed legislation. Unfortunately, the Board of Regents Education Committee rejected a motion to make such a statement, instead resolving to refer questions about layoff policies to the Regents Task Force on Tenure.

At this moment, the budget remains in the Joint Finance Committee while Republican leaders work out other details. Once those issues are settled, the bill will go to the Assembly and Senate for their approval. Governor Scott Walker has said he would like to complete the budget process well before the fiscal year ends June 30.

While the window of opportunity to do so is rapidly closing, PROFS will continue to explore every avenue to eliminate the damaging language of item #39 before it is passed by the Legislature.

What you can do in the meantime:

- Follow the [PROFS website](#), [Twitter feed](#), and [Facebook page](#) for updates.
- Consider [notifying us](#) of your willingness to speak with legislators and/or the media as a representative of the UW-Madison faculty, especially if you believe you may have an especially effective story to tell!
- Consider attending a [special meeting](#) of the UW-Madison Faculty Senate on Tuesday, June 9 at 3:30 pm in 1306 Health Sciences Learning Center, 750 Highland Avenue. The sole agenda item is the faculty response to the tenure provisions in the Joint Finance Committee omnibus motion and subsequent UW System Board of Regents actions. While only senators may vote and make motions, all present may hold a discussion with the chancellor.

Regards,

Grant Petty, PROFS president

PS: Please consider [joining PROFS](#) if you are not already a member. PROFS membership dues support our small professional staff that diligently monitors developments in the state capitol and organizes meetings with legislators and their staffs, among other activities.